UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ECA/CPH/2(a)
5 May 1987
ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Working Group on Recommendations for the 1990 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in Africa

Addis Ababa, 18-22 May 1987

EMERGING ISSUES IN AFRICAN POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

Review of Organizational Issues in the Planning and Execution of Censuses

CONTENTS

		Paragraph	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1-4	1
II.	LEGAL BASIS OF THE CENSUS	5-7	1
III.	CO-ORDINATING BODIES	8-10	2
IV.	IMPLEMENTING BODY	11-13	2-3
V.	STAFF	14-17	3-4
VI.	FACILITIES	18-24	4-5
	(a) Premises	18-20	4-5
	(b) Equipment	21-24	5
VII.	MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS	25	5
VIII.	CONCLUSIONS	26-31	5-6

I. INTRODUCTION

1. A population and housing census is certainly the most extensive and complex statistical operation. It comprises a set of closely related activities and requires a large multidisciplinary staff. It is a very expensive undertaking which requires very meticulous preparation if satisfactory results are to be achieved.

2. The organization to be established depends basically on the objectives, funds, material resources and manpower available. The geographical situation and other factors such as economic and social development and the level of education of the population should also be taken into account.

3. A population census has several administrative and technical aspects. The present document deals only with the administrative aspects of a census.

4. The administrative organization of a census requires the establishment of a structure to manage and implement the various activities constituting the census programme. As high-level decisions have to be taken and tasks have to be carried out by the relevant technical departments, the relationships between all the bodies and departments responsible for co-ordinating and implementing the census activities have to be defined and their duties clearly spelled out.

II. LEGAL BASIS OF THE CENSUS

5. As a first step the organization of a census operation must have a legal basis. In most French-speaking African countries, legislation has to be enacted for the census. It establishes the various bodies involved in the census, specifies their role and objectives and sets the date of the census.

6. In planning their censuses all the French-speaking African countries enacted legislation establishing the organizational structure for the census particularly the co-ordinating and implementing bodies. In the English-speaking countries of the region, the legislation for the statistical system (Statistics Act) is usually sufficient to enable a population and housing census to be conducted. In some cases, however, special Gazette Notice or census proclamation is issued to strengthen the provisions of the Statistics Act.

7. If such census legislation does not already exist, it has to be prepared early enough, preferably before the scheduled starting date of the technical preparatory activities.

III. CO-ORDINATING BODIES

8. Almost all the countries have established national census committees or commissions which are the highest decision-making bodies responsible for defining the objectives of the census, and priorities in the processing of the data, mobilizing resources and all available means. These committees were composed of high political and administrative authorities.

9. Although in some countries the census organizers found the performance of the committees satisfactory in that they effectively helped to carry out the census, sometimes they were of no help whatsoever; in some cases they never even met at all. This inefficiency could be blamed in some cases on their membership which was often too cumbersome to be efficient because the organizers' sole concern was extensive and high-level representation.

10. Decentralized regional, local or provincial committees with the same membership as the national committees were also established to carry out activities in the regions.

IV. IMPLEMENTING BODY

11. The countries established both national (central census office, national census office) and regional census offices to carry out censuses. These offices did not always have the necessary organizational structure due to shortage of qualified staff and lack of resources. In a number of cases only two or three departments of the census office were operational and the head of the office was responsible for administration management, organization and methodology because in many countries the census office started with only one or two statisticians o demographers.

12. Enough qualified professionals must be assigned in time to the census office to allow the activities to begin on schedule. Duties should be well defined within the office and it must operate with some flexibility so as to adjust to the various phases of the census. The structure of the office could include the following main sections which should become operational in accordance with the schedule of operation:

(a) Methodology: This section prepares the plan of work and the concepts, designs the questionnaire, etc.

(b) Cartography: Prepares all the census maps used at the various stages of the census, assists in the preparation of geographic codes and thematic maps during the analysis and publication phases.

(c) Communication: (publicity) This section handles public relations, prepares and co-ordinates the implementation of the publicity campaign aimed at the general public and the authorities;

(d) Field operations: Its staff varies with the various phases of the operation and is at its maximum during the enumeration stage. The section is responsible for setting up regional offices, hiring and training staff, distributing equipment and carrying out the enumeration as well as census tests and the post-enumeration surveys;

(e) Administration and finance: This section is responsible for managing the staff and their salaries and the equipment, and for preparing the budget, etc.

(f) Data processing: This section is responsible for coding, data entry, programming, data validation, tabulation, etc.

(g) Evaluation and analysis: This section is responsible for evaluating the quality and coverage of the census and analysing the data collected;

(h) Reproduction-publication: It is responsible for reproduction and publication of all census-related documents, and may be equipped with a small printing press.

13. The census office should, whenever possible, be made a permanent section of the statistics department; this would ensure continuity in census work, the updating of census records, particularly maps and drawing up of plans for future censuses. A permanent office would enable the technical staff to improve their skills and gain more experience in the collection and analysis of data.

V. STAFF

14. A population census requires a relatively large number of people with different qualifications corresponding to the various stages of implementation. There are two main categories of staff to be identified and recruited: subject-matter specialists and field staff. African countries have considerable difficulties in finding both the subject matter specialists and the field staff required by the census office in view of the shortage of experienced personnel referred to earlier. During the 1970 African census programme, most African countries used resident external technical experts;

this trend is now being reversed as a result of the training activities undertaken since then. However, despite such staff training activities, there have still been some problems in hiring senior staff. It has even been difficult to recruit field staff, particularly enumerators, in several countries because of the shortage of persons with suitable qualifications.

15. The staff required to carry out the census activities must fit into the structure of the census office, namely:

(a) subject matter specialists comprising a team of statisticians, demographers, cartographers or other specialists responsible for the methodology to be used,

(b) field staff who should be assigned on the basis of density, the country's geography, administrative structure and the transport and communications network. The staff required here are supervisors (in-charge of field operations), team leaders, (in charge of technical supervision) and enumerators (who do the actual counting).

16. Estimates of the number of such staff required must be based on the structure of the census office, each officer's work-load and his productivity,

17. During the recent censuses about 10 enumerators were supervised by one team leader or controller (the term varies from country to country). It is quite obvious that such an arrangement will not enable the team leader to perform his supervisory role effectively because of the work-load and inadequate transport facilities. A team leader should not have more than 3 to 5 enumerators under him unless the transport problem is solved.

VI. FACILITIES

(a) Premises

18. Census operations require adequate space, in particular for cartography, coding and computer processing.

19. In many countries, census offices either did not have adequate office space or were located in different buildings which were often far apart. In many instances, the required premises for coding and data entry were considered only after the completion of the enumeration.

20. The census office must be given suitable office accommodation for its various activities well in advance. Whenever possible, the census office should occupy one single building (so as to accommodate all the sections) with adequate space. Also a smooth movement of documents should be ensured (verification, coding and data entry should be carried out in contiguous rooms).

(b) Equipment

21. This section covers the transport facilities required for the various operations (census cartography, pilot census, enumeration, post-enumeration coverage check, etc.) office equipment (furniture, reproduction equipment, calculators), field equipment and data processing hardware.

22. In many countries, there were delays in acquiring some equipment in particular transport and data processing equipment. Vehicles intended for mapping work were received several months after the scheduled start of field operations and sometimes even towards the end of the mapping work which was therefore difficult to carry out. In some instances, electronic data processing equipment was received two or more years after the completion of enumeration.

23. In order to avoid delays in enumeration and census data processing, a timetable should be prepared for the procurement of equipment and orders placed well in advance.

24. At the time of the initial censuses, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) contributed substantially to the acquisition of transport, as well as office and data processing equipment. In view of the sharp reduction in UNFPA contributions, the countries will have to mobilize more national resources to carry out the next round of censuses.

VII. MANAGEMENT PROBLEMES

25. Here it should be stressed that there is a need for strict accounting but flexible procedures and for financial documents on each item of expenditure so as to permit an evaluation of spending patterns.

VIII. CONCLUSION

26. A population census requires a well structured and strict administrative organization where the responsibilities and duties of each body and each staff member are well defined and the various tasks clearly indicated.

27. The administrative structure must be flexible enough to be easily adjusted to the various phases of the census.

28. The various organs should be established well in advance (2 to 3 years) before the actual enumeration in order to avoid delays in starting the various operations. Since consultation and co-ordinating bodies should be operational, their membership should not include high-ranking officials since such officials often find it difficult to attend the meetings of the committees.

29. The census office must have enough qualified officers and must enjoy a considerable autonomy in the management of its staff and budget.

30. It is recommended that permanent structures should be established within statistics departments for carrying out future censuses.

31. In order to carry out the various operations on schedule, the census office must be given the financial resources required and all the appropriate equipment on time.